REMARKS

Claims 1, 2 and 15 have been amended. claims 1-15 and 17 remain in the application. Claims 1-3 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Byrnes et al., and claims 4-15 and 17 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) where Byrnes et al. is used as the primary reference.

Since Byrnes et al. fails to disclose a meniscus at annular axial end faces of each viscoelastic sleeve as required by amended claims1 and 15, all remaining claims distinguish over the art of record and are believed to be allowable. A notice to that effect is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicolas CERTAIN

4-27-04

Date

y:____

Richard L. Fix Reg. No. 28,297

STURM & FIX LLP 206 Sixth Avenue, Suite 1213 Des Moines, Iowa 50309-4076

Phone: 515-288-9589 Fax: 515-288-5311